

# EDUCATORS USE CAREER



# “GAMES”



# TO TEACH LIFELONG CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS

By Phillip S. Jarvis

*In half the schools in Canada and in over 25,000 classrooms across the United States students from grade 3 to grade 12 are being introduced to careers through an innovative new game-based process called The Real Game Series. Originated in Canada, these programs have been developed and tested through a not-for-profit international partnership involving the Governments of Canada and the U.S., State and Provincial Departments of Education and professional associations across both countries.*

Most youth aren't sure how to make informed, intentional career decisions. Just prior to graduation many are not clear what they want to do when they enter the workforce. The majority of students do not proceed directly from secondary to postsecondary, in spite of projections that most work in coming years will require some postsecondary qualification. Of those youth who go directly to college or university programs, not to mention apprenticeship or trades training, nearly half change programs or drop out by the end of their first year. Not unlike U.S. statis-

tics, of those Canadian students who graduate, 50 percent will be in jobs not directly related to their programs of study two years after they graduate (Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada biannual *School Leavers Survey*).

## Traditional Guidance Paradigm

The traditional vocational guidance paradigm expects students, with help from career counselors or teachers, to make an informed, long-term career choice before graduating from high school. Yet, when groups of adults are asked if they are now doing what they expected to be doing when they graduated, less than 10 percent (educators and nurses excepted) raise their hands. The evidence suggests only a small minority of people is able to identify a “calling” at a young age, despite the pressures to which we continue to subject youth, and their advisors, to do so.

The traditional vocational guidance model was primarily about helping people make an informed occupational

choice, and went as follows:

1. Explore one's interests, aptitudes, values, etc. (often with tests and professional help).
2. Explore the world of work (occupations).
3. Determine a “best fit” occupation by matching personal traits to occupational factors.
4. Develop a plan to obtain the prerequisite education and training.
5. Graduate, obtain secure employment, work hard, climb the ladder.
6. Retire as young as possible on full pension to enjoy the rewards of years of hard work.

Steps 1 through 4 still apply to the new career management paradigm, although the terms work role, cluster or industry sector may be substituted for occupation. Contemporary workplace realities, however, now make these steps *recurrent* and dramatically increase the need for ready access to career and labor market information and support services. Step 5 is no longer assured, and step 6 will only occur for those who learn career management skills,

including financial planning, responsibility and self-discipline. Moreover, more and more people who enjoy their work don't want to stop at a fixed date.

## New Career Management Paradigm

The new career management paradigm is not so much about making *the* right occupational choice as it is about equipping people with the skills to make the *myriad* choices necessary throughout their lives to become healthy, self-reliant citizens, able to cope with constant change in rapidly changing labor markets, connect with work they enjoy, and maintain balance between life and work roles. The cornerstones of the career management paradigm are the "high five" principles:

1. Know yourself, believe in yourself and follow your heart.
2. Focus on the journey, not the destination. Become a good traveler.
3. You're not alone. Access your allies, and be a good ally.
4. Change is constant, and brings with it new opportunities.
5. Learning is life-long. We are inquisitive by nature and most alive when we're learning.

In the new career management paradigm, the question "What do you want to be when...?" is replaced by questions like:

- Who are you now, and what do you love to do?
- What are your special talents and skills?
- What types of situations, environments and activities have special appeal for you?
- What types of organizations need what you can offer?
- What innovative work arrangements will suit you and potential employers?

## National Career Development Guidelines

Pioneering work on a national career management skills framework was initiated by the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee in 1988. The result was the *National Career Development Guidelines* that were adopted by many U.S. states through their State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees. With NOICC's permission, Canada began adaptation of the guidelines in 1998. The result is Canada's



Michael Gangitano guides his students through the use of The Real Game Series at Lee Junior High School in Woodland, Calif.



## The Real Game Series in Action

By Michael Gangitano

Three years ago I discovered The Real Game Series. It was at this time that our school made a decision to greatly expand our career education focus. We became convinced that a comprehensive school-to-career program must begin prior to students entering high school. Included in this plan was the implementation of a career exploration class, which I developed and have taught to the majority of our seventh graders as one of the courses in the elective program for the past three years.

Currently, students spend nine weeks in the course before rotating out into another class. Our goal is to eventually have every student in the school participate in the class as part of their career preparation experience. We also have initiated all-school career days each spring, where up to one hundred members of our business community speak to all our students about their jobs and the importance of career management planning.

Initially, I was searching for any and all curriculum materials that I could utilize in the class. I purchased The Real Game sight unseen, became familiar with the lessons, and began using it. Almost immediately it became the centerpiece instructional tool of the class. If I had to describe how The Real Game works in the

briefest of terms, I would say that it is a program that engages students in a classroom setting around career management issues in such a way that they are immersed in a real life, practical application of what they are learning in their other classes. In my experience, this is one of the most difficult tasks of the classroom teacher: how to convince young people that what they are doing in school is important and will help arm them with the skills they will need to succeed in life. Far too many students fail to see the relevance of their education. In our best of intentions, we attempt to impart knowledge to our students without giving them an opportunity to engage in a "here and now" application of that information. The Real Game does just that.

The curriculum is neatly packaged and very flexible. The facilitator's guide walks the instructor through the lessons and allows the user to adapt them to the individual needs of the setting in which they are being used. Although I use The Real Game in a career class that meets daily, it can easily be woven into any academic class.

Essentially, the curriculum is divided into four units that allow students to embark on a journey where

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High school students use The Real Game Series in Sacramento, Calif.

*Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* ([www.blueprint4life.ca](http://www.blueprint4life.ca)). Thousands of American and Canadian career practitioners, employment counselors, educators, human resources specialists and researchers have now spent fourteen years developing, piloting, evaluating, revising and implementing this career management skills framework.

Australia and the United Kingdom are now establishing national career management skills frameworks based on the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint*.

Both the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* identify core career management competencies with associated performance indicators at four developmental levels across the lifespan. The core competencies are the basis upon which career development programs can be designed. The performance indicators, which are organized by learning stages, can be used to measure learning gains and demonstrate the effectiveness of such programs.

Competencies are arranged in three Areas (from *Blueprint*):

**Area A: Personal Management**

1. Build and maintain a positive self-image.
2. Interact positively and effectively with others.
3. Change and grow throughout ones' life.

**Area B: Learning and Work Exploration**

4. Participate in life-long learning supportive of life/work goals.
5. Locate and effectively use life/work information.
6. Understand the relationship between work and society/economy.

**Area C: Life/Work Building**

7. Secure or create and maintain work.
8. Make life/work enhancing decisions.
9. Maintain balanced life and work roles.
10. Understand the changing nature of life and work roles.
11. Understand, engage in and manage one's own life/work building process.

The *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* provide the basis for setting the learning outcomes, establishing performance standards, and measuring success in any public or private sector agency in the career development business. They are foundation pieces of the new career management paradigm, and implementation is well underway. More and more departments of education, labor and workforce development, community services and others are integrating the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* into their career management programs or imbedding their competencies into their own guidelines. Career resources, programs, curricula and services from public and private sector organizations large and small are being coded to the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* competencies and performance indicators. Orientation and train-the-trainer sessions are available to educators, career and employment counselors and human resources specialists to make effective use of the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint* and its diverse supporting materials.

**The Real Game Series**

The networks represented in America's Career Resource Network Association ([www.acrna.net](http://www.acrna.net)) develop and distribute to citizens in every state and territory the highest quality, career, learning and labor market information delivery systems and resources.

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Students use The Real Game Series at the Lemon Hill Career Center in Sacramento, Calif.



they begin to make adult decisions about adult issues, i.e. making a living, buying a house, paying bills, quality of

life, dealing with a changing world, etc. Each student is randomly assigned a job from a list of forty. The student becomes this person and begins to learn what it would be like to have this career. They become familiar with:

- job description
- gross monthly income
- education and experience
- transferable skills
- vacation and leisure time
- average weekly work hours.

They choose their housing and transportation options and then have to figure out how they are going to make ends meet, just like their parents have to do. They are *required* to balance their monthly budgets. Because the average salary varies greatly depending on what job a student has, some students must make very difficult decisions on what they are willing to part with in order to balance their budgets. In a related activity that is introduced later in the curriculum, some students learn they will lose their jobs due to economic or other factors. They then must develop a plan, with the assistance of their classmates, to survive the situation and move on. This is when all the students learn how to create a resume, a tool they will need in their career journey.

As students progress through the lessons of The Real Game, they begin to understand and appreciate the complexity of adult life in ways they never imagined. They have an opportunity to closely examine how they would like their adult lives to be by “practicing” it now. They truly begin to draw connections between what

they are learning in school and how it will impact them tomorrow as well as twenty years from now. It is simply amazing how this phenomenon unfolds before their very eyes as well as the instructor’s.

Because this curriculum is activity based, hands on, and very practical, it is easily adaptable to students from varied backgrounds and ability levels. Students strong in certain skills such as math become very helpful to those

## ***The learning objectives and performance measures of The Real Game have been deliberately aligned with academic learning standards.***

who are not through the team building aspect of the curriculum. Students become good collaborators and are able to identify who their allies are and how to access them.

As the students approach the end of the game, they link their past, present, and future lives through the activity, “Circle of Life.” They are now able to use the information and experience from the class to establish

a road map, one that comes with a myriad of skills they have acquired and can use to negotiate with on their journey through life.

The learning objectives and performance measures of The Real Game have been deliberately aligned with academic learning standards. The curriculum can easily be introduced into a language arts, social studies, math or science class because it addresses the skills that need to be mastered in those classes. Students are administered a pre/post test and their ongoing progress is assessed through the performance indicators built into each lesson. I have also received a tremendous amount of feedback from parents, teachers, administrators and community members regarding the effectiveness of the program. Long after students have completed the class, they can be overheard talking about the importance of what they learned. Our district is in the process of piloting The Real Game Series in several schools that will have K-12 classrooms represented.

Although I began using The Real Game before attending the recommended training, I would encourage anyone considering using it to attend an accompanying training. I found it to be very useful. It reinforced what I was already doing, but it also gave me very helpful ideas to use.

I would recommend The Real Game Series without hesitation or equivocation to anyone searching for the key to unlock the mystery of how to make education relevant in the lives of so many of our students who have lost their way. It is a magical experience for those who are willing to get on board, focus on the journey, and follow their hearts. **Q**

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Many also promote learning resources to help their citizens acquire career management skills. One ACRNA learning resource, The Real Game Series ([www.realgame.org](http://www.realgame.org)) is now used by over a half million students each year in over 25,000 classrooms across the United

participants master the career management competencies in the *Guidelines* and *Blueprint*. All of the activities of The Real Game Series have been keyed to competencies in the three areas of personal management, learning and work exploration, and career building.

colleges, universities, One-Stop career resource centers and employment service sites, vocational rehabilitation and workers' compensation settings, human resource offices, correctional institutions, military settings and community volunteer agencies across Canada, the United States and internationally.

The series incorporates increasingly challenging concepts and vocabulary which students learn by taking on real life and work roles in the safety of the classroom. Through playing the games, students and teachers get dramatic new insights into the relevance of the curriculum to future life and work opportunities. They see connections not obvious to them before, such as why math, science and English lessons are important to their lives.

For more information on The Real Game Series and other exemplary career resources contact the Career Resource Network in your state by visiting: [www.acrna.net](http://www.acrna.net). 

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Program	Grades	Ages
The Play Real Game	3 to 4	8 to 10
The Make It Real Game	5 to 6	10 to 12
The Real Game	7 and 8	12 to 14
The Be Real Game	9 and 10	14 to 16
The Get Real Game	11 and 12	16 to 18
Real Times, Real Life	Postsecondary	Adults

States. It helps students see the relevance of their school courses to their future while learning career management skills.

The Real Game Series consists of six separate programs, each of which is tailored to a specific range of age and grade levels. The basic aim of the series is to introduce realities of the adult world of work in a meaningful way and to help

The programs are packaged in three-ring binders that include all facilitator and student materials needed to implement the programs for as many participants as desired, year after year. The series is extremely flexible with the ability to customize the lessons to fit almost any institutional framework. Currently the series is being used in K-12 schools,

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